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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities

Statement submitted by International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2005/100.

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Statement

2005 is a landmark year for the United Nations, and indeed for every member of the world community. In particular, those living in extreme poverty around the world are hoping that their expectations will be met, and that finally they will be able to foresee a future for their children of true freedom, free from extreme poverty. In the words of a parent who often goes without food so that his children can go to school: "our children must not endure what we had to live through."

As we review the actions of the last five years in working towards the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and look towards 2015 and beyond, we need not remind ourselves of the extreme urgency of the goal of the eradication of poverty. However, if the international community continues to fail to recognize and utilize the contribution to development that people with first-hand experience of extreme poverty are willing and able to make, the MDGs and other international goals to eradicate poverty will not be reached. As people living in poverty continue to be seen as mere recipients of assistance, their own efforts and hopes are often overlooked. Despite their frequent invisibility, "families all over the world remain the most vital force in the battle to eradicate poverty... The mutual caring, sharing and nurturing that family members provide for one another are often the essential elements that allow people living in poverty to survive each and every day."[1]

In his recently released report, "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", the UN Secretary-General writes that every human being should be free from want and describes extreme poverty as poverty that kills. International Movement ATD Fourth World agrees that extreme poverty is a genuine risk to life. It ends the lives of people due to hunger, preventable diseases, violence and exploitation, and many other results of poverty. But it also prevents women, men and children from developing their full potential, being respected, and living in dignity. It excludes people from the human family and prevents them from participating in the social and political lives of their communities and nations.

The founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Joseph Wresinski, defined extreme poverty as follows: *"A lack of basic security is the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume professional, family and social responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may become more extended and lead to more serious and permanent consequences. Extreme poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibility in the foreseeable future"* (See E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, annex III).

Joseph Wresinski was born into poverty and throughout his life established major landmarks in the fight against the worst forms of poverty, in collaboration with other partners and primarily the very poor themselves, in industrialized as well as developing countries.

The success of poverty eradication initiatives must be rooted in the realities of the lives of the people they are trying to help. Only through genuine partnership will change come. This is illustrated in the following example, particularly relevant in this International Year of Microcredit.

In the late 1990s, a woman living on the street in West Africa shared a testimony during the commemoration of the International Day of the Eradication of Poverty. On that day, her public commitment to stop begging had a huge impact on those gathered, but raised the question of how to support her and others to find a better means of survival. ATD Fourth World's subsequent consultation with the community resulted in the planning and implementation of a microcredit project. However, ATD Fourth World's experiences in other countries made it clear that no single approach fits all members of a community. In Central America, a woman said about a

[1] See *How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights* (International Movement ATD Fourth World, 2004).

microcredit project: *"I cannot participate because I cannot stand the looks my neighbors give me. They know a lot about me and so they laugh at my situation. They know private things: that my partner abandoned me, that some of my children live in the streets and use drugs, and that... my morale is at rock bottom."* Later, after the entire community had been involved in the project, new relationships of trust led the men and women involved to perceive themselves differently. The woman commented, *"Now when people scorn me in the street, it affects me less. I know that there is something other than begging."* All of the participants discussed guidelines that would respect everyone and take into account the realities of their lives. This process and the long-term support and respect that followed ensured success and the personal investment of time and energy enabled the participants to play a vital role in the fight against poverty rather than merely receiving aid.

The scandal of inequalities in our world demands immediate action and we agree with the Secretary-General when, in his report entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", he advocated the launch of a series of "quick-win" initiatives so as to realize major immediate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (A/59/2005, para. 5 (h)).

At the same time, the Secretary-General noted in the report that development successes cannot take place overnight and many countries suffer significant capacity constraints (A/59/2005, para. 31). At the country level we mustn't forget that the fight against poverty and extreme poverty is a long-term and ongoing process which requires the commitment of all; notably States, intergovernmental agencies, the private sector, civil society, and citizens.

This long-term process particularly requires:

- the building of a better understanding of extreme poverty and exclusion, considering the poorest as important experts in this field, and the entering into a genuine dialogue with them,
- the development of laws and policies which take account of this knowledge and expertise and recognize the distinction between poverty and extreme poverty,
- the continual evaluation of the policies in the framework of the following questions: What is the social impact of these policies on the most vulnerable? Who is not being reached by our actions? What must be changed within our actions in order to reach them?

  Evaluations must look at the various levels and types of poverty, or the most fragile will be overlooked.
- the support of those who choose to fight against poverty alongside the poor and the poorest, so they are able to continue and expand their efforts in the long term.

These principles apply to action in both industrialized and developing countries. The persistence of extreme poverty in industrialized countries demonstrates that a high general level of wealth is insufficient alone to eradicate extreme poverty and social exclusion, and that ambitious reforms are necessary tools in a democracy to unceasingly build policies that are rooted in the realities of the most excluded.

The following quote from people who used to live in the streets in Eastern Europe demonstrates the strength of many people in spite of the many hardships they must endure: "We are the people of perseverance. Tell everybody they must not give up the fight. Tell them we want to be in contact with them throughout the world. Because when you realize that you are among many of us who are moving forward together, you keep your courage in order to encourage others." We must move forward in partnership with people living in extreme poverty in order to ensure that the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals are met.